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FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5037
INFO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0602
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 0355
RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU PRIORITY
RUEHMOS/REO MOSUL PRIORITY 0015
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//USDP:PDUSDP/ISA:EUR/ISA:NESA/DSCA// PRIORITY
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002226

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/21/2026

TAGS: [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH PRESS EXAGGERATES TROOP BUILD-UP IN THE
SOUTHEAST

REF: A. ANKARA 1897

[1](#)B. ANKARA 1821

Classified By: Political-Military Counselor Timothy A. Betts, reasons 1
.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Recent Turkish press reports claim the Turkish Land Forces Command (TLFC) has initiated a movement of its headquarters to southeast Turkey and undertaken a massive build-up of troops there to fight the PKK. Some go further to suggest this will include cross-border operations into Iraq. MFA officials dismiss the idea of cross-border operations but TGS officially remains silent. We are not aware of any unusual troop build-up beyond the annual relocation of forces in preparation for a PKK spring offensive in Turkey. TGS may see advantage in the PKK's believing an attack could be in the making. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Press reports on April 20 and 21 claimed Turkey is amassing up to 250,000 troops along the country's border with Iraq in preparations for a spring offensive against the PKK both inside and outside of Turkey, and that the Land Forces headquarters will temporarily move to the southeast to direct the operations. According to an April 21 Reuters report, a senior Turkish military official said TGS has sent 40,000 troops from central and western Turkey to the southeast to back up security forces fighting the PKK in Van, Hakkari and Sirnak provinces and that more are on the way. An article that same day in the Turkish daily (Radikal) contains a TGS acknowledgment that military units in the southeast have been reinforced but denies that TLFC headquarters will be moved. Another daily (Milliyet) said there had been a massive troop build up in the past 48 hours, possibly in preparation for cross-border operations.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The reports claiming an extensive build-up of troops may have erroneously characterized the permanent presence of about 200,000 troops in eastern Turkey -- provided by the 2nd Army, located in the southeast, the 3rd Army, in the northeast and the Jandarma troops (which traditionally have the lead in PKK operations) -- as new troops. In late March, the media widely quoted military sources as saying one additional combat battalion from Bolu (northwest Turkey) and one from Kayseri (central Turkey) were moving to the southeast as part of the regular rotation of troops to that region to respond to the annual spring/summer upswing in PKK activity. While this troop and related armament rotation is typically conducted in May, the increased fighting in the

southeast in early spring (reftels) may account for the earlier timing. However, these two battalions combined contribute only about 1,000 additional troops to forces fighting in the southeast. We are unaware of any other significant troop movements.

14. (C) The Turkish General Staff (TGS) has not issued a statement denying an increase of troops and our contacts in the TGS J-3 Operations Division did not want to comment on the issue, instead referring us to the MFA for the official GOT position. MFA Terrorism Director General for Security Affairs Hayati Guven and former Deputy Director General for the Middle East and future Consul General in Mosul Avni Botsali separately brushed off the idea that Turkey was massing troops along the border in preparation for cross-border operations in Iraq. They did acknowledge, however, that it would not be unusual for TLFC to deploy additional troops to the southeastern region this time of year to combat the PKK presence in Turkey. At an April 20 lunch hosted by the DCM, retired Major General Kuloglu dismissed suggestions that the Land Forces headquarters would be relocated to the southeast but did agree that the military would establish a small combat headquarters in the southeast to conduct operations against the PKK.

15. (C) Late April 21, NTV news channel reported that military sources close to the matter say that, at this stage, there are definitely no plans for a cross-border operation, period.

Ankara does not want to undermine the political process in Iraq by introducing Turkish soldiers into northern Iraq. Conducting a cross-border operation on the eve of U.S. Secretary of State Rice's visit to Ankara is viewed as

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discourteous rather than a show of determination. A reporter

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told us this source was a TGS general.

16. (C) COMMENT: The lack of an official statement from TGS denying an unusual build-up along Turkey's border with Iraq could suggest that the military does not wish to comment on ongoing operations. TGS may also perceive an advantage to having the PKK believe there is an extraordinary build-up in Turkish military strength along the border. END COMMENT.

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